

SHIPPER SEASON EIGHT

“This Is Your Life I”

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Logline

An offer from the gods results in a chance for Xena, Ares, Gabrielle and Eve to relive and change their past.

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TEASER

FADE IN

Outside Lila's house in Potidaea. Gabrielle and Darion are sitting on the porch. It's a gray, cloudy day.

GABRIELLE (obviously close to tears but trying to put on a brave face):

I'll come back soon, okay? Maybe we'll find Lykia and she'll come back with me. (Darion nods) And I know you'll have a really good time staying here with Lila and Sarah.

DARION:

Can't I come with you? I promise I'll be good.

GABRIELLE (shocked):

Darion! Do you think I want you to stay here because you've been bad? (She shakes his head) It's not that at all...it's just that the kind of life Xena and I have--it's just not right for a little boy. (stroking his hair) You know--always on the road... (sighs and looks down) ...always fighting...

DARION:

I like being on the road with you.

GABRIELLE:

But don't you think it would be nice for you to stay in one place for a while? You know, sleep under the same roof every night...have regular meals every day... (Darion makes a face and she smiles at him) ...play with other kids...

Darion's face lights up for a moment, then turns wistful.

DARION:

I'll miss you. (after a brief pause) And Xena.

GABRIELLE:

I'll miss you, too. (she hugs him tenderly) Don't worry, it's only for a short time. I'll be back soon.

They pull apart and Gabrielle looks at Darion, clearly uncomfortable.

GABRIELLE:

Darion... (she lowers her eyes, then looks up again) ...I wanted to tell you--about what happened--just before you and Haimon came out here... (Darion looks away nervously) I know you were really scared...

DARION (softly):

You thought that man wanted to hurt me. That's what Haimon said.

GABRIELLE (smiles wanly):

He did? (sighs) Yes, sweetie, I thought he wanted to hurt you.

DARION (nods uncertainly, then looks questioningly at Gabrielle):

That man...he was really, really bad, right?

A pause as Gabrielle looks at him hesitantly, obviously not knowing quite what to say.

GABRIELLE (lowers her eyes):

Right. (she gathers Darion in her arms again) I'll never let anyone hurt you. You know that, don't you?

DARION:

Yeah.

GABRIELLE (kisses the top of his head):

I love you, Darion.

DARION (looks up and kisses her on the cheek):

I love you too.

The camera pans to Xena and Eve, who come out of the barn leading their horses, saddled and ready for travel; Xena is also leading Gabrielle's horse. Xena stops and looks wistfully at Gabrielle and Darion, who are still hugging.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Eve riding along a road with Xena in the middle. All three women look lost in thought.

GABRIELLE (snaps out of her reverie and glances at Eve):
So, are you glad to be going back to the Amazons?

EVE (absent-mindedly):
Yeah...I guess so.

XENA (glances at her):
Eve, is something wrong?

EVE (sighs):
I'm just--confused.

XENA (gently):
About what?

EVE:
Virgil and I... (she trails off and looks down)

GABRIELLE (looks at her and smiles):
You're in love.

EVE:
I'm not sure...but--we really care about each other. (pauses) There are so many things...if we're going to be together, what am I going to do about my duties to the Amazons?

XENA (gives her a probing look):
That's not all that's bothering you, is it?

EVE:
He tells me he's forgiven me.

GABRIELLE (gently):
Then I'm sure he has.

EVE:
Maybe. But can he ever forget?

XENA (grimly):
That's the way it is, Eve. You can try to make up for the past, but you can never run away from it.

GABRIELLE:
That's so true... (off Xena's sharp look) Xena--I was thinking about something Ares said to me, back in that village--right after I killed Taphius.

XENA (sharply):
What did he say?

GABRIELLE:

That I keep running away from who I am now...from the responsibility that comes with being a warrior.

Xena gives her a long, anguished look.

CUT TO

A close-up of a sword plunging into a man's chest, then being yanked out, glistening with blood. We hear the cacophony of battle: clashing metal, neighing horses, shouts, grunts, and screams.

The camera pulls back to show a battlefield where a battle is raging. A montage of battle scenes follows:

- * a warrior on horseback is struck by an arrow in the chest, clutching at his chest and slowly crumpling off his horse;
- * two warriors spar with each other; one of them loses his footing and falls, and the other raising his sword to finish him off;
- * a riderless horse gallops across the field, neighing in fright;
- * a hand swings a mace and brings it down on someone's helmet.

The camera pulls further back to show Ares standing on a rock over the battlefield, surveying the battle, his face impassive, his eyes hooded.

There are two flashes of light on both sides of him, and Zeus and Hera materialize standing next to him.

ARES (coldly, still looking at the battlefield):

Mom. Dad. To what do I owe the pleasure?

ZEUS (with mild reproach):

Son. I was hoping that by now, we would have gotten past our--estrangement.

ARES (sarcastic):

So you two decided to pop in here just to tell me you love me.

HERA:

No. To tell you that after everything you did for us, we thought it was time we did something for you.

ARES (steps back and eyes them warily):

Exactly what do you mean by that?

ZEUS:

Not just for you. (he pauses as Ares watches him intently) You, Xena, Gabrielle and Eve braved Hell itself to bring us back. Your mother and I felt that you all deserved a--reward.

ARES:

Took you long enough.

ZEUS:

What we are offering you goes against our--usual rules. It had to be weighed very carefully.

ARES (wryly):

Oh yeah. Olympian red tape. (pauses) So what exactly is this offer?

HERA:

A chance to change your destinies.

A close-up on Ares' face, taken aback but clearly interested, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

Xena, Ares, Gabrielle and Eve stand in the Fates' temple. The camera slowly pans over the loom and the three Fates who are standing in front of the loom: Atropos, the crone; Lachesis, the young woman; and Clotho, the girl.

GABRIELLE (shivers slightly):

This place certainly...brings back memories.

Ares glances at her and looks away.

XENA (coldly):

So how exactly is this thing going to work? You change something about the past and all of a sudden we find ourselves in a different present? I've been through that before. As I recall, it didn't work out too well.

ATROPOS:

No, Xena--

LACHESIS:

This time, you will not be there--

CLOTHO:

You will observe.

The three fates each stretch out an arm and point a finger at a side wall of the temple. The air shimmers and solidifies into a silver-colored square.

LACHESIS:

Each of you can go back--

ATROPOS:

To one moment in your past --

CLOTHO:

--and choose to do one thing differently.

ATROPOS:

Then, you will watch your life--

LACHESIS:

--as it would have unfolded from then on.

XENA:

We all watch?

ATROPOS:

All of you.

LACHESIS:

And if you all agree that one of the lives you see would be better--

CLOTHO:

--you can choose to make it real.

GABRIELLE:

And then what's going to happen?

LACHESIS:

You will all go back in time--

CLOTHO:

--to the point where you made your different choice--

ATROPOS:

--and live out that life--

LACHESIS:

--and remember nothing of--

CLOTHO:

--this one.

Xena, Gabrielle, Ares and Eve exchange uncertain looks.

GABRIELLE:

I'm not sure we should do this.

EVE:

What have we got to lose?

ARES (glances at her uncomfortably):

She's right, you know. If we don't like the way it turns out, we could keep things as they are.

XENA:

All right, then. Let's do it.

GABRIELLE:

How much of these new lives are we going to watch? We could be stuck here for months!

ATROPOS:

To go forward in time--

She waves her hand, and a silver thread with a bead on it appears in Ares' hands.

CLOTHO:

--move the bead.

XENA:

So we each get a choice.

LACHESIS:

You do.

All four look uncertainly at each other.

GABRIELLE:

So who goes first?

ATROPOS:

Ares--

LACHESIS:

--you are an Olympian--

ARES:

Oh no. Ladies first.

Xena, Gabrielle and Eve look at each other.

XENA (sighs):

I'll go first.

CLOTHO:

Then all you must do--

LACHESIS:

--is touch the portal and think of a moment in time--

ATROPOS:

--and the vision will take you there.

CLOTHO:

For a moment, you can become your past self--

ATROPOS:

--but only until you have changed the one thing you wish to change.

LACHESIS:

Once that is done, you may no longer touch the portal again--

CLOTHO:

--or the vision will end.

The Fates step back. Xena comes up to the portal.

ARES (obviously trying to mask his unease):

Let's all get comfortable, shall we?

He waves an arm, and a couch appears before the portal. Ares, Gabrielle and Eve sit down, with an empty space left between Ares and Gabrielle and Eve sitting next to Gabrielle. Meanwhile, Xena holds out her hand and touches the portal. It begins to acquire colors, and shapes begin to emerge in it. The portal fills the screen.

We are in a flashback from RETURN OF CALLISTO. Xena comes riding on Argo while Callisto is raising her sword over Gabrielle. Perdicus, knocked out by Callisto, lies nearby. Xena dismounts in a flip and kicks Callisto, knocking her down.

CALLISTO:

I longed to see you wailing over the body of your friend.

XENA (sneers):

Well, it's not going to happen.

Xena and Callisto fight, sparring with their swords and exchanging kicks.

The camera pulls back to show Xena touching the portal, a look of intense focus on her face.

In the portal, Xena leaps and flips in the air so that she is between Callisto and Perdicus, and then slams her boots into Callisto, sending her staggering toward her horse just as Perdicus gets up. Callisto looks around, then flips onto her horse with a loud cry and rides away.

GABRIELLE:

Oh, Xena--thank the gods!

XENA:

Wait here.

She mounts Argo and gallops away after Callisto.

Xena walks back from the portal and sits down between Gabrielle and Ares.

GABRIELLE (gives Xena a stunned look):
That was your choice? To save Perdicus?

XENA:
Maybe this way, you can have the kind of life you deserve.

GABRIELLE (softly, almost to herself):
Without you... (snaps out of it and gives Xena an alarmed look, as if realizing that it looks like she's sorry that Perdicus was saved) It's just been--such a long time since I have even imagined what my life with Perdicus would have been like...

ARES:
Hey. Can we skip the sensitive chat and watch the action?

Xena and Gabrielle turn to the portal.

Xena is chasing Callisto, both of them urging on their horses with cries of "Yah! Yah!" Xena leaps forward, tackling Callisto and punching her. She knocks Callisto off her horse and they both tumble down the hillside, as in RETURN OF CALLISTO, and roll down onto the quicksand. In a moment both are immersed up to their waist. Xena looks around in alarm.

CALLISTO (laughs):
We're both gonna die, Xena. How wonderful! We can spend the rest of eternity in Tartarus together.

XENA (smirks):
Always the optimist.

She pulls herself up and pulls out her chakram as Callisto looks on, then throws it so that it lodges itself in a rock, and throws her whip so that it winds itself around the chakram.

CALLISTO (laughs):
Oh, you're *good*, Xena!

Grabbing the whip, Xena pulls herself up from the quicksand while Callisto watches in dismay, sinking in deeper.

CALLISTO (reaches up):
Xena! Help me!

XENA (looks back at her scornfully):
Hold on.

Reaching solid ground, Xena unwraps the whip from the chakram and throws it to Callisto. Callisto grabs the whip and slowly starts to pull herself up while Xena looks on with a mix of hate, pity, and contempt.

CALLISTO (chuckles as she reaches solid ground):

Well, well, Xena...I knew you wouldn't let me die! You'd miss me too much, wouldn't you?

XENA:

Just be glad I stopped you before anything happened to Gabrielle--or her husband. Otherwise, you'd be spending eternity in Tartarus getting sand out of your leathers.

CALLISTO (now on the ground, on her hands and knees):

Oh, that's right...I didn't take proper care of your little friend. (laughs) Don't worry, Xena--I'll take another stab at it.

XENA:

I wouldn't count on that if I were you.

Xena knocks Callisto out with a powerful punch in the face, then uses her whip to bind her hands tightly behind her back, drags her to the top of the hillside and slings her over Argo's saddle before mounting Argo and riding off.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle stand outside a village house. It's a bright, sunny morning.

GABRIELLE:

Xena...thank you for everything.

XENA (softly):

Thank *you*, Gabrielle--for everything you've brought into my life.

GABRIELLE:

You're going to be all alone now... (smiles) Well, except for Argo.

XENA (with forced cheer):

Don't worry about me. I've always been able to take care of myself. (chuckles)
Besides, Joxer is probably going to keep me company, whether I want him to or not.
(squeezes Gabrielle's hands)

Perdicus comes out of the house.

PERDICUS:

Xena. You're leaving?

XENA:

Good-bye, Perdicus. Take good care of Gabrielle. I know you're going to be happy together.

GABRIELLE:

We've already decided that when we have a little girl, we're going to name her Xena.

Close-up on Xena's face. She is smiling but obviously struggling to hold back tears. Xena and Gabrielle hug, then pull apart.

GABRIELLE (hesitantly):
What's going to happen to Callisto?

XENA (grimly):
This time, she'll never hurt anybody again.

CUT TO

A close-up of Callisto, with a large bruise on her face, smiling maniacally. The camera pulls back to show that she is standing on a platform with her hands tied behind her back and a noose around her neck.

CALLISTO:
Xena! I knew you'd come to see me off!

The camera pans to Xena, who stands in the front row of a large crowd of villagers. She is silent, her face is hard as stone. Pan back to Callisto.

CALLISTO:
You made me what I am--and now you're going to watch me die.

XENA:
You died a long time ago, Callisto--when you let hatred destroy your soul.

OFF-SCREEN VOICE (female):
Hang the bitch!

OFF-SCREEN VOICE (male):
Do it!

Xena's face flinches slightly. Pan to Callisto, who continues to smile. The trap door opens with a screech and we see Callisto's head jerking downward. Quick pan to Xena's face. She is calm but there is anguish in her eyes.

Xena and Gabrielle avert their eyes.

GABRIELLE (pensively):
I wonder if that was the end of Callisto, this time...

A country road at dusk. Xena is riding alone.

XENA (pats Argo on the neck):
I guess it's just you and me now, girl...

ARES:

So you ditched the blonde. Good move. (off Xena's sharp look, holds up his palms in a "time out" gesture) Just kidding.

XENA (as if struck by a sudden thought):

I wonder...

GABRIELLE:

What?

XENA:

Callisto's in Tartarus now. You know what happened last time...

Ares clears his throat and squirms visibly.

Night. Xena sleeps at a campsite.

DISSOLVE TO

Dawn. Xena opens her eyes and looks around, half-awake.

XENA:

Gabrielle? (her face crumples as she realizes that Gabrielle isn't there)

GABRIELLE:

You're obviously still yourself.

XENA (somberly):

I suppose this time around, I didn't feel so much guilt over Callisto's death...there was nothing that (uncomfortably) anyone could use against me. (quick pan to Ares looking away uneasily)

GABRIELLE:

So Callisto never got out.

XENA (struck by an idea, looks at Ares):

And you never became mortal.

ARES (uncomfortably):

Hmm...

A quick montage of images of Xena traveling alone, fighting some thugs, sleeping at a campsite.

CUT TO

Xena is brushing down Argo at a campsite.

XENA (quietly):

Do you miss Gabrielle? Huh? I know you and Gabrielle didn't really get along... But I still think you miss her just a little, don't you?

Argo neighs softly and nuzzles Xena.

Xena, looking intensely uncomfortable, moves the bead. In the portal, now viewed from a distance, we see her battling some thugs while a village burns in the background.

XENA (raises her voice):

What about Gabrielle? Show me Gabrielle's life!

ATROPOS (off-screen):

Let Gabrielle touch the bead--

LACHESIS (off-screen):

--and then--

CLOTHO (off-screen):

--you will see.

Gabrielle lays her hand on the bead.

Gabrielle sits at a table, working on a scroll, with a candle nearby. Perdicus comes up behind her and puts a hand on her shoulder, bending toward her. She looks up, smiling tenderly, and they kiss.

DISSOLVE TO

A crowded hall. Gabrielle, in a flowing blue dress, stands up on the stage.

GABRIELLE:

I sing the song of Xena,
Great warrior and great friend--

DISSOLVE TO

Wild applause in the hall. A close-up of Perdicus, sitting in the front row, applauding.

CUT TO

A middle-aged man in a purple cloak on the stage.

MAN:

And the first prize of the Grand Festival of Performing Bards goes to Gabrielle, the Bard of Potadaea!

Wild applause.

CUT TO

Gabrielle, smiling, stands on the stage next to the man in the cloak. He puts a gilded wreath on her head.

CUT TO

Perdicus and Gabrielle walk in the street. The wreath that is still on her head gleams softly in the setting sun.

PERDICUS:

Sweetheart, you were wonderful.

GABRIELLE (wistfully):

I just wish Xena could have been there...

PERDICUS (puts an arm around her shoulder):

I'm sure you'll see her soon.

GABRIELLE (turns to him and smiles shyly):

Perdicus, I have some other news.

PERDICUS:

What?

GABRIELLE:

I think I'm--going to have a baby.

PERDICUS (overjoyed):

Oh, Gabrielle!

They stop and hug.

XENA:

Gabrielle, this is the kind of life you should have had. If I had only stopped Callisto in time--

GABRIELLE:

But what about you?

XENA (smiles tensely):

I'm sure I turn out all right.

Gabrielle takes her hand and puts it on the bead. The vision in the portal changes. Xena is sitting at a campfire with Joxer.

XENA:

See? I have company.

The camera zooms in on the portal until it fills the entire screen.

XENA (pensively):

So Gabrielle is going to have a baby.

JOXER:

Yeah (grins) --can you believe that?

XENA (shoots him an impatient look):

I can. I mean, she *is* married.

JOXER:

Yeah, well--she told me that if it's a girl, she's going to name her--

XENA (smiles and lowers her eyes):

--I know--she told me. Xena.

A short uneasy silence.

JOXER:

Um, Xena--Gabrielle was asking me if I'd seen you--

XENA (tensely):

Yeah?

JOXER:

And she was, um--wondering why you never visit...she said you told her you would...

XENA (shrugs):

Well, she and Perdicus have their own life... I figure I'll just be in the way...

GABRIELLE (looks incredulously at Xena):

Xena, what were you going to do? Never see me again?

Xena looks away guiltily.

Xena sits at the campsite alone. The fire is starting to die down, its reflections lighting up her face.

Suddenly, she shivers slightly and looks up, her eyes widening.

XENA:

Ares...

Ares shimmers into view. He has the same look as in INTIMATE STRANGER--medium-length hair, the Season 1-2 leather vest.

XENA:

What do you want?

ARES (lounges casually against a tree, folding his arms on his chest):

So you ditched the blonde. Good move.

Xena gives Ares a sharp look. Ares clears his throat and looks down.

ARES:

Or, come to think of it, *she* ditched *you*, didn't she? You know, it's funny--all this time, I've been trying to figure out a way to get that annoying girl off your back. Turns out she didn't even need my help.

XENA:

Get lost.

ARES:

So. How much longer do you think it's going to be? I figure--oh, two months. Three, tops.

XENA (not looking at him):

Until what?

ARES:

Until you come back to your senses.

XENA (bitterly):

You mean, come back to *you*.

ARES:

Well--yeah, that too. Now that you don't have what's her name--Danielle--

XENA (snarls):

Her name is Gabrielle and you know it.

ARES (chuckles):

Don't worry, soon enough you won't remember it either. Anyway, now that you don't have that little pest messing with your head anymore--

XENA (looks up at him, her stare bitter and defiant):

Forget it, Ares. You're wasting your time. I told you--I'm *never* coming back to you, or to what I was. I'd rather die.

ARES (sighs theatrically):

So melodramatic. Oh well...you know what they say--never say never. See you around, Xena.

He vanishes in a flash of light. Xena stares thoughtfully into the dying campfire.

Xena looks at Ares in dismay.

ARES (reluctantly meets her stare):

I can see this is going to be a long day.

Xena turns back to the portal and moves the bead forward. There is a quick succession of images of Xena riding, fighting, standing on the deck of a ship with Ulysses, battling in Ulysses' castle, paddling down a river in a canoe.

GABRIELLE:

Xena--what's this?

The camera moves in closer to the portal.

As Xena paddles down the river, she suddenly sees a body float by with an axe in its back, then another. She pauses and looks around in horror, then starts paddling very fast.

GABRIELLE (whispers):

The Horde.

Close-up on Gabrielle's horrified face as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

As in *THE PRICE*--except that she is alone in the canoe--Xena paddles down the river past dying men on the bank tied to X-shaped crosses. An axe flies at her from the bank and she deflects it with her oar, then paddles furiously. On the shore, a man breaks free and swims toward the boat. Xena looks at him, obviously in conflict over whether to help him, then paddles toward him and leans forward, helping him get his arm over the edge of the boat.

XENA:

Hold on tight!

Pan to two Horde soldiers who are following her in a canoe.

MAN:

They'll catch us both! Let me go!

XENA:

No! No, I've got you now! I'm keeping you.

DISSOLVE TO

The Athenian fort. Xena stands looking around in dismay.

MERCER:

Man the battlements! Watch for attack!

DYING MAN:

Mercer! Mercer! They have to be stopped! (coughs) They have to be--

He dies.

CUT TO

Xena approaches an Athenian soldier crouched by the battlements.

XENA:

You taking a break, soldier?

SOLDIER:

Yeah--from reality?

XENA:

You think you can grab your sword and get placed before they come over the wall?

SOLDIER (exasperated):

Lady--it just doesn't matter anymore. We're running out of food; we're running out of men; and we're running out of time. Those things out there have us. Today, tomorrow--what's the difference?

XENA (kicks up his sword and catches it, then grabs him by the shoulder and hauls him to his feet):

Now, take this sword (hands him the sword), get back on that wall, and do your job. 'Cause what they might do to you is nothing compared to what I'll do.

Another soldier charges Xena and she knocks him down, throwing him over the battlements. A third soldier tries to attack her and she repels him with a kick. A Horde axe flies over the wall and she catches it in her hand.

SOLDIER (in shock):

Who are you?

XENA:

My name is Xena.

SOLDIER:

Xena? Xena of Corinth? The Warrior Princess of Kalmae? The one who defeated Callisto?

XENA:

You've heard of me.

SOLDIER:

What do you think we should do?

XENA (raises her voice):

Well, first, keep your weapons where you can get at them. And stand *at* the wall, not under it or near it! (she walks along the battlements, addressing the soldiers who look up in wonderment) Every fourth man, take a rest! The man either side of him will cover for him! And if anything moves between here and the trees--kill it! (she stands between two pillars of grey stone) We're not gonna let these bastards defeat the elite of the Athenian army, are we?!

SOLDIERS (in unison):

No!

SOLDIER:

Tell us what to do, Xena!

XENA:

Do? (she brandishes the Horde axe) We're gonna kill 'em all!

The soldiers cheer, brandishing their swords, as Xena looks ahead, a glint in her eye.

Ares leans back, staring at the portal. He is obviously enjoying what he sees.

Xena looks down, clearly uncomfortable.

GABRIELLE:

Xena...we were able to defeat the Horde--

XENA (still looking down):

Thanks to you. (she looks at Gabrielle, biting her lip) Because you had the humanity to take water to the Horde wounded, and then there was a truce. Thanks to you, I tried to understand the Horde, and then I figured out that I could defeat them by fighting their leader.

GABRIELLE:

What do you think is going to happen--?

XENA (grimly):

We'll see.

GABRIELLE (pleading):

Xena, I want to stop it.

XENA (thinks for a moment):

No. No. Maybe I found another way.

She turns back to the portal.

Soldiers are hoisting dead bodies up on the battlements on sharp spikes.

Xena is coming to the battlements with Menticles.

XENA:

Make sure half those bodies go to the south wall. If we're gonna fool them, we'll have to make them think we have reinforcements.

CUT TO

The Horde attack. The Athenians battle them.

XENA:

Everybody down! Now!

Athenian archers rise from behind the battlements and from other hiding places and starts shooting at the Horde. Horde warriors are falling everywhere. Xena grabs a bow and beats back Horde warriors with it, kicking at others. She cuts a Horde warrior's throat with a battle-axe.

A Horde soldier is running away. Xena rushes to the battlements. Her face contorted in a snarl, she throws the axe at him. He falls with a scream.

ATHENIAN SOLDIERS (cheering):

Xena! Xena! Xena! Xena! Xena!

Xena walks among them, smiling, obviously pleased.

CUT TO

Xena, Mercer and Menticles in the command hut.

XENA:

Trying to get out of this valley without reinforcements would be suicide. We're gonna do something about that.

MERCER:

You plan to swim down the river and climb the cliffs.

MENTICLES:

Hold on. You can't leave. The men'd lose hope if you disappeared.

XENA:

He's right. As much as I hate to admit it, I have to stay here. Mercer will go. Get ready.

CUT TO

A quick montage:

- * Athenian soldiers are throwing smoke bombs create a cloud of smoke on the battlefield;
- * Athenians fight the horde while Mercer runs under the cover of smoke;
- * Xena crawls on the ground in the dissipating smoke checking the bodies of Horde soldiers. One of them, with a large nose ring and red and blue paint on his face, comes to and tries to grab her throat. She punches him out and drags him back toward the fort.

CUT TO

Inside the command hut, the Horde soldier on his knees looks up at Xena.

XENA (leans down toward him, map in hand):

Let's make this simple. I know you don't understand me, but I wanna make some things clear. We are here. (points to a spot on the map; the Horde warrior nods) You (touches the Horde warrior) --where?

MENTICLES:

Look--the animal understands. But he's not gonna help us. Let me try!

He raises his sword. Xena holds up a hand, stopping him, then jabs her fingers in the man's neck. He starts wheezing.

MENTICLES:

What have you done?

XENA:

I've shut off the flow of blood to his brain. He'll be dead in moments--and he knows it. He can feel his life draining away. (holds the map before the man's face) Show me! (the man continues to wheeze and choke. Finally Xena jabs her fingers in his neck, taking off the pinch) Take him to the supply room. Chain him up.

MENTICLES:

You mean, kill him.

XENA:

I mean, chain him up. We can still find ways to make him talk.

The prisoner is dragged away.

CUT TO

Xena is on the battlements with some soldiers.

SOLDIER:

Xena! Look, it's Mercer! The bastards got him!

Xena looks down. Mercer, badly wounded, is crawling across the field. Xena looks up, her face grim and hard.

SOLDIER:

Should we send someone out to help him?

Xena looks down. Already close to the gates, Mercer tries to get up; an axe thrown by a Horde soldier hits him in the back of the head and he falls down, dead.

XENA:

Not anymore.

CUT TO

Xena, very grim-faced, walks into the supply room with Menticles. She is holding the map. The Horde warrior sits chained by the wall.

HORDE WARRIOR (looks up and moans):

Kaltaka...kaltaka...

XENA (looks at Menticles):

Kaltaka. What does that mean?

MENTICLES (shrugs):

Their wounded keep saying that. Must be their god of war--they're praying to him as they die.

Close-up on Gabrielle's anguished face. There are tears in her eyes.

GABRIELLE (murmurs):

No! No! It's water. He's just begging for water. Please, Xena--please try to understand. Please.

Xena, a pained look on her face, puts a hand on Gabrielle's arm.

XENA (a cruel smile on her lips):

Well, Kaltaka won't help you now, whoever he is. (backhands the Horde warrior across the face, making his head snap to the side) But I'm going to give you another chance. (holds up the map and pokes a finger at it) Where?

The man is silent.

XENA:

Time for an encore.

She jabs her fingers in the man's neck. He starts choking and wheezing. Xena and Menticles look on as he jerks his hands up, trying to clutch at his throat. Blood starts to flow from his nose. His eyes roll up and he dies.

A close-up on Gabrielle's face, tears rolling down her cheeks.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, stop this. Stop this. You're going to die--everyone in the garrison is going to die.

ARES (heavily):

I don't think so.

Xena turns to him and looks at him sharply.

XENA:

What?

ARES (sighs):

Xena, I was watching you the whole time.

Xena and Menticles stand over the dead man. Suddenly, Xena shivers and her eyes widen.

XENA (to Menticles):

Go check what's happening on the battlements. I'll join you in a minute.

Menticles leaves.

XENA:

Ares.

ARES (materializes behind her):

Hello, Xena. (sighs dramatically) This is quite a fix you're in, isn't it? A couple more days, and you and your men are gonna start running out of food and water. Somehow, I doubt that even you will be able to keep their spirits up.

XENA (sneers bitterly):

Let me guess. You're here to help.

ARES:

I am. (Xena whips around and stares at him intently) I have an army camped just a few hours' march from here. One word from me, and they'll be here by sunrise.

XENA (gives him a blistering look):

If I agree to serve you again. I know your kind of help comes with a price tag.

ARES (presses his hand to his chest in mock hurt):

Xena, Xena, Xena. So suspicious. I just want to help my favorite warrior--with no strings attached. Just keep doing what you've been doing. I'm not asking for anything else.

XENA (looks at him warily but with a little less hostility):

You want me to fight in your name.

ARES (shakes his head, smirking):

I don't care if you fight in the name of your great-grandmother. Just fight and lead your troops to victory. (Xena looks at him, obviously starting to waver) Come on, Xena. You're gonna let all these men die because you're too stubborn to accept my help?

A pause.

XENA (softly, her shoulders sagging a little):

All right. I accept.

CUT TO

The battlements. The sun is starting to set. Xena comes up to Menticles.

XENA (businesslike):

Listen up. Tomorrow, right after sunrise, we're getting out of here.

MENTICLES (gives her a shocked look):

Are you insane? We'll get slaughtered!

XENA:

No, we won't. We have reinforcements coming from Linnea.

MENTICLES (astonished):

How do you know that?

XENA (smiles coldly):

I have my sources.

DISSOLVE TO

The battlements at sunrise. Xena and Menticles stand looking out into the distance. Xena is wearing a helmet. From among the trees, a kite flies up, gleaming in the sun.

XENA:

That's our signal. (raises her sword) Go!

CUT TO

The Athenian troops, led by Xena, stream out of the fort's gates. Horde warriors emerge from the trees and attack.

The camera pans to warriors in red-and-black vests attacking from the other direction. There is a quick succession of battle scenes as the Athenians and the reinforcements sent by Ares fight the Horde. The camera zooms in on Xena, brandishing a sword, her eyes glittering dangerously.

XENA (screams):

Kill 'em all!

CUT TO

A Horde warrior on his knees, holding out his hands and obviously begging for mercy. The camera pans up to Xena, her eyes sparkling, her lip curled in a sneer. She runs the man through with her sword.

XENA:

Why don't you pray to Kaltaka now!

Ares watches the scene in the portal, leaning back, smiling almost sensuously. Then he turns to look at Xena and sees her anguished, horrified expression. The smile fades from his face.

The Athenian soldiers and Ares' soldiers cheer on the battlefield. The ground is strewn with the bodies of dead and dying Horde warriors, as well as some bodies of Athenians and of Ares' soldiers.

MENTICLES:

Victory is ours! (loud cheers; Menticles raises his sword) Xena!

A chant of "Xena! Xena! Xena! Xena!" goes up.

Xena smiles as she hears her name being chanted. Then she looks at the dead bodies around her and at her own blood-spattered hands. Suddenly, her face crumbles.

While the soldiers continue to cheer in the background, Ares appears behind Xena and leans in toward her. He takes off her helmet, in a shot reminiscent of the Illusia scene in THE BITTER SUITE after she has "killed" Gabrielle; Xena has the same dazed, "lost" look. Ares wraps his arm around Xena's waist, his lips almost brushing her ear.

ARES (in a soft, suave voice):

Welcome home, Xena. Welcome home.

The camera pulls back and pans to Xena, Gabrielle, Ares and Eve. Gabrielle is staring at the portal horrified; Ares is looking down; Eve has dropped her head into her hands. Xena looks dazed.

GABRIELLE (screams):

Stop it! *Stop it!*

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

Gabrielle jumps to her feet, rushes toward the portal and slams her fists into it. The vision in the portal fades. Gabrielle stands next to the portal, breathing hard. The camera pans back to Xena, who blinks as if coming out of a daze.

XENA:

But Gabrielle--what about your life--

GABRIELLE:

Do you think *I* want to have a good life while this happens to my best friend?

A brief pause. Then, Xena's face softens into a tender smile, and Gabrielle smiles back at her.

XENA:

All right. It's your turn to choose now.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, are you sure we want to do this? Look at the way the first one turned out.

XENA (smiles affectionately):

You're bound to make a better choice than I did.

GABRIELLE (hesitantly):

All right.

She places her hand on the portal and closes her eyes. The portal fills with color. The camera zooms in and we see the scene in Dahak's temple in THE DELIVERER.

Meridian raises the dagger over Khrafstar, who is tied to the altar, while Dahak's blue-robed followers chant.

MERIDIAN:

With this life--we praise Dahak, the Dark One.

Gabrielle, who is being held by two followers of Dahak, elbows one of them and punches the other, knocking them down, then rushes toward the altar. She punches out Meridian, grabs the knife from her and cuts ropes binding Khrafstar.

KHRAFSTAR (shouts):

Gabrielle!

Gabrielle turns to see Meridian rushing at her with a sword. She ducks and the sword strikes the altar. Gabrielle turns as Meridian raises the sword again. Instead of stabbing her with the dagger, she kicks her in the midsection. Meridian goes flying toward the wall and lands hard on the floor.

GABRIELLE (to Khrafstar):

Khrafstar, come on! Run!

Khrafstar gets up. Behind Gabrielle's back, he throws his fellow cultists a meaningful look and follows Gabrielle out of the temple.

A wide shot of Xena, Ares, and Eve sitting in front of the portal, riveted. Gabrielle comes back and sits down.

EVE (to Gabrielle, a little timidly):
Was that where you--first killed?

GABRIELLE (nods):
Khrafstar made me believe he was serving a god of love and peace. It was all a setup--to make me kill her and bring Dahak into the world.

EVE:
And that's how you had...your baby.

GABRIELLE (lowers her eyes):
Hope... (looks up at Xena) Xena, I didn't just do it for me! If it hadn't been for Hope, Solan wouldn't have died...

EVE (softly and pensively):
My brother...

Xena is too overcome with emotion to say anything.

ARES (looks curiously at Gabrielle):
How come you still chose to go to the temple?

GABRIELLE:
If I hadn't gone then, Khrafstar could have lured me there some other time.

ARES (with grudging respect):
You know, you do have brains.

Gabrielle chuckles bitterly.

The camera closes in on the portal again.

Somewhat out of breath, Gabrielle and Khrafstar stop in a grove.

KHRAFSTAR (takes Gabrielle's hands):
Thank you, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:
What happened back there?

KHRAFSTAR (shakes his head):
They've obviously been corrupted--taken over by some evil... Please don't hold it against my god, Gabrielle. The god I told you about--he's real. He's good. Please believe me.

GABRIELLE (gives him a wrinkle-nosed smile):
Of course I believe you.

ARES (glances mockingly at Gabrielle):
I take it back.

GABRIELLE:
What?

ARES:
What I said about your brains.

GABRIELLE (irritably):
Well, how was I supposed to know?

KHRAFSTAR:

I can't let this happen, Gabrielle. I have to take back our temple from this false god they worship.

GABRIELLE (squeezes his hands):

You will, Khrafstar. I know you will.

KHRAFSTAR (looks deeply into her eyes):

Will you stay here and help me?

A brief silence as Gabrielle obviously considers his offer.

Close-up on Gabrielle's face; her expression is one of horror and disbelief.

GABRIELLE (whispers):
No!

The camera pulls back. Xena looks just as horrified as Gabrielle while Ares adopts a mask of nonchalance.

ARES:
Uh-oh.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

No, Khrafstar. I wish I could...but I have to go back with Xena.

Gabrielle breathes a huge sigh of relief and pats Xena on the shoulder.

GABRIELLE:
Let's see what happens next, shall we?

She moves the bead.

Xena and Gabrielle are on a pier, getting on a boat.

XENA:

Looks like we go back to Greece with no trouble.

GABRIELLE (stares into the portal, with sudden joy):

And I never followed you to Ch'in! Xena, you see, it all makes sense-- (the joy fades from her face)
--I would have never betrayed you if-- (she trails off)

XENA (stares at her, gently):

--if I hadn't left you behind when you were hurting the way you were. (she takes Gabrielle's hands and holds them a moment)

GABRIELLE (smiles, almost tearful):

Don't blame yourself, Xena. It was my fault.

She moves the bead again.

GABRIELLE:

Xena--look!

[Clip from MATERNAL INSTINCTS]

Xena and Gabrielle are walking in the meadow outside the Centaur village.

XENA (suddenly stops and listens):

Shh.

Solan leaps from a tree and tries to tackle her.

XENA (grabs him, grinning happily):

Solan, you dirty rat!

SOLAN:

I almost had you! I've been practicing!

XENA:

Very impressive. Don't you do it again. What do you think, Gabrielle? Some tracker, huh?

GABRIELLE:

He's a natural. Hi, Solan.

Xena stares at the portal. Her eyes fill with tears. Ares rather awkwardly puts his hand on top of her hands, which are folded in her lap.

Gabrielle, without noticing this, glances at Xena and, seeing the emotion in her face, moves to put her hand on top of Xena's. Her hand brushes against Ares' hand; she flinches slightly and moves her hand to Xena's shoulder.

The outskirts of the village. Xena and Gabrielle are facing Kaleipus, Solan, Ephiny and Xenan.

KALEIPUS:

Thank you for your help, Xena.

XENA (smiles):

The treaty was your doing. The Centaur nation will be forever grateful.

GABRIELLE:

Good-bye, Ephiny. (she and Ephiny hug, then Gabrielle squats down to hug Xenan)
Bye, Xenan!

SOLAN (to Xena):

Come back soon, okay?

XENA (a little wistfully):

I'll try... (she grins, obviously suppressing her emotion, and slaps his shoulder) You be good, now.

GABRIELLE (stands up and turns to Solan):

You're gonna keep up those lessons with the staff, right? (smiles and nods at Ephiny)
Ephiny can show you some good moves.

SOLAN:

Yeah, by the time you come back I'll be as good as you!

XENA (playfully punches him in the arm):

Let's hope it's not gonna be *that* long. Takes a while to get as good as Gabrielle.

SOLAN:

Oh yeah? You wanna bet?

Xena laughs and musses his hair.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle walking away from the village.

GABRIELLE (gives Xena a gently reproachful smile):

You still haven't told him.

XENA (sighs):

Gabrielle--I don't even know where to start...

Xena stares at the portal, smiling through tears.

XENA (to herself):

My baby... (she flinches a little, suddenly remembering that Ares, Gabrielle and Eve are there; her lips tighten and her eyes shift nervously) He's okay.

GABRIELLE (nods as she moves the bead forward):

Maybe everything's going to be okay this time.

There is a brief pause as they look at each other, smiling.

ARES (points to the portal):

Ooh, look. A fight.

Xena and Gabrielle arrive in a town square to find a chaotic melee. About a dozen warriors in black and silver are beating, punching and kicking some people.

The camera zooms in on a warrior about to punch a woman. As he raises his fist, Xena's gauntleted arm comes into view and she grabs his wrist, intercepting the blow. He turns around in shock.

XENA (sneers):

Mind if I cut in?

She punches him out and she goes flying backwards. Xena and Gabrielle start to fight the warriors, Xena dispensing powerful kicks and using her sword, Gabrielle fighting with the staff. Emboldened, some of the people start to fight back too. In a short time the warriors retreat, disappearing down a street. Xena and Gabrielle chase after them and then stop.

In a flash of light, Ares (Season 3 look--the long hair and the sideburns) appears before them. He is visibly upset.

ARES:

What do you think you're doing?

XENA (smirks as she re-sheathes her sword):

What we usually do. Beating the crap out of some thugs, standing up for the little people...

ARES (scowling):

You should have stayed out of this one.

XENA (unflappable):

What, were they *your* thugs?

ARES:

They were my temple warriors.

XENA (with a crooked grin):

Well, Ares, your temple warriors are just going to have to get their workout some other way.

ARES:

Dammit, Xena, this isn't funny! Those precious little people of yours are members of a dangerous cult.

XENA:

Thanks for the character reference.

GABRIELLE:

As long as those people aren't harming anyone, they have the right to worship in any way they want.

ARES (sarcastic):

Oh, look who decided to speak up.

XENA (takes Gabrielle's shoulder and turns around):

Come on, Gabrielle.

They start to walk away.

ARES (shouts after them):

You're making a mistake!

GABRIELLE (gives Xena a puzzled look):

Followers of Eli?

XENA:

They can't be.

Xena and Gabrielle return to the square where they are greeted by applause from the people.

As they look around, they are approached by a young woman in a simple sleeveless white gown; she is slender, slightly taller than Gabrielle, with dark brown hair gathered in a ponytail, and hazel eyes.

YOUNG WOMAN:

Thank you, whoever you are.

XENA (nods toward where the warriors went):

I don't think they're coming back any time soon.

GABRIELLE:

What did they want with you?

YOUNG WOMAN:

To stop me from telling these people about our god. You see, we believe that the time

of many gods has passed. (with a beautiful smile) There is only one god, and soon, he will bring his kingdom to the world.

XENA (dryly):
Fascinating.

YOUNG WOMAN:

Those who serve the old gods don't appreciate the message I bring. After all, in our god's kingdom, there will be no room for the likes of--Ares.

XENA (narrows her eyes, obviously not liking what she hears):
Shouldn't they be able to serve their gods just as you serve yours?

YOUNG WOMAN:

Our god doesn't want us to serve him--just to take him into our hearts.

GABRIELLE (smiles):
That doesn't sound like any god I know.

YOUNG WOMAN (smiles back at her):
Would you like to know more about our god?

GABRIELLE (a little uncertainly):
Maybe. By the way, I'm Gabrielle. (puts her hand on the arm of a still skeptical-looking Xena) This is Xena.

YOUNG WOMAN:
My name is Hope.

The camera pans over the faces of Gabrielle, Xena, Ares and Eve. Gabrielle's look is one of wide-eyed horror and anguish; Xena's face tightens with bitterness and controlled rage; Ares looks shocked and sick to his stomach; Eve seems slightly bewildered. The camera then pulls back to show the four of them staring into the portal as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

The same scene as before.

ARES:

I think I can see where *this* is going. (turns to Gabrielle) What are you, some sort of evil-guru magnet?

XENA (sharply):
That's enough.

GABRIELLE (dismayed):
I don't understand...how could this have happened?

XENA:
Obviously, they tried it again with somebody else. Somebody who must have looked (gestured toward the portal) like that.

Pan back to the portal.

HOPE:
Xena--Gabrielle... (to Gabrielle) Are you the one who saved Khrafstar?

GABRIELLE (her face lights up):
You know Khrafstar?

HOPE:
Of course. Together, we won our temple back from Meridian and her accomplices. Khrafstar told me about you--he often said he wished we had you on our side. (Gabrielle smiles, obviously pleased) He's here with me in Greece.

GABRIELLE:
Really? I'd love to see him.

HOPE:
He's at our camp less than an hour's walk away. I'm headed back there now with some of. (she gestures toward the crowd) Do you want to come with us?

GABRIELLE:
Of course!

XENA (brusquely):
One moment.

She takes Gabrielle's arm and pulls her aside.

GABRIELLE (looks up at her, puzzled):
What?

XENA:
Gabrielle, how can you be so trusting?

GABRIELLE (exasperated):
How can you be so cynical?

XENA:
Think about it. How can you be sure that she's not with Meridian and those others?

How do you know Khrafstar is even alive? (Gabrielle looks at her, starting to waver) Do you really want to go with her to this camp?

GABRIELLE (a little hesitantly):
I do.

XENA:
Well, then I'll come with you.

CUT TO

A field in the countryside. The sun is starting to set. Xena, Gabrielle and Hope, along with about a dozen people, are approaching a camp. As they get close, chanting can be heard and white-robed people are seen walking about the camp. Gabrielle can be seen talking to Hope, while Xena walks slightly apart from them, looking around warily.

They approach the edge of the camp. Gabrielle stops, a joyous smile spreading on the face. The camera pans to Khrafstar, dressed in a white robe, who stands smiling at Gabrielle.

KHRAFSTAR (strides toward Gabrielle):
Gabrielle! I was hoping I'd see you again.

GABRIELLE:
Khrafstar! I'm so glad you're all right.

Khrafstar and Gabrielle hug. As they pull apart, he turns to Xena.

KHRAFSTAR:
Xena! How great to see you.

XENA (in a neutral tone):
Good to see you too, Khrafstar.

GABRIELLE (turns to Xena):
Xena, I'd like to stay here with them for the night.

XENA (with a notable lack of enthusiasm):
All right. I'll go back to town.

GABRIELLE (a little disappointed):
Are you sure you won't stay too?

XENA (shakes her head with a half-smile):
Nah, not my kind of thing. (she hugs Gabrielle) You'll be back at the inn tomorrow, right?

GABRIELLE (brightly):
Of course.

Flanked by Hope and Khrafstar, she stands watching Xena walk away.

KHRAFSTAR (takes her hand):

Come on, Gabrielle. I have so much to tell you.

XENA (angry at herself):

Damn! I didn't see through Khrafstar, either.

GABRIELLE:

But you're suspicious. I think you're going to try to do something. (takes Xena's hand and moves it toward the bead) Let's see what you're up to.

XENA (turns to her, abruptly):

While you're back there with a bunch of maniacs?

GABRIELLE:

We can always check up on me later. Come on, Xena.

Xena reluctantly places her hand on the bead.

Xena is walking along a country path as dusk falls. Suddenly, she stops and looks around. Ares stands under a tree, leaning on its trunk with one hand.

XENA:

Aren't you tired of following me around?

ARES (saunters up to her):

I keep waiting for you to say that to your irritating little friend. (Xena snorts and starts walking again as he follows her) You know, she's gonna get you in big trouble.

XENA (walks on briskly, looking straight ahead):

What's that supposed to mean?

ARES:

Her new friend. (a shade of nervousness creeps into his voice) Hope.

XENA:

What about Hope?

ARES:

She's not human.

Xena stops in her tracks and turns around abruptly.

XENA:

What?

ARES:

She's a vessel for Dahak.

XENA (flinches):

Dahak...

ARES:

The god I tried to warn you against in Britannia.

XENA (pensively):

I've heard that he's an evil god who must not be let into the world... (her tone turns brusque again) You're telling me that Hope and Khrafstar are followers of Dahak? He's their One God?

ARES (emphatically):

Hope is not just his follower. She's his *daughter*--created as his gateway into this world.

XENA:

This is ridiculous. (she turns and starts walking on again. Ares teleports himself so that he stands in her path.) Get out of my way.

ARES:

You don't believe me?

XENA:

Give me one reason why I should.

ARES (sighs):

Ah, the good old days.

ARES:

Why would I make this up?

XENA (stops and looks at Ares, her mouth curved in a sneer):

You're afraid that girl is going to steal your worshippers. So you want to use me to get rid of her. (mockingly) Nice try, Ares, but it's not gonna happen.

She turns and starts walking again. Ares stays behind; he looks after her, scowling, and then vanishes.

CUT TO

The camp of Hope's followers. Hope, Khrafstar, and Gabrielle sit around a campfire.

HOPE:

Your friend doesn't trust me.

GABRIELLE (defensively):

No--no, it's not that. I mean--it's not *you*. Xena just finds it difficult to--open herself up to people sometimes.

KHRAFSTAR (smiles):

I'm sure that before too long, Xena will see Hope for what she really is.

Gabrielle looks like she wants to ask something but is hesitant; she lowers her eyes.

HOPE:

What is it, Gabrielle? (she reaches out and touches Gabrielle's chin, lifting up her head)

GABRIELLE (stumbling a little):

Hope, you said before that in your god's kingdom, there will be no room for the likes of Ares. You didn't mean that he's going to be--killed, did you?

ARES (looks wryly at Gabrielle):

Awww. I'm touched.

HOPE (caresses Gabrielle's cheek):

Of course not. It isn't the way of our god.

GABRIELLE (smiles brightly as she puts her hand on top of Hope's):

I knew that. Tell me, Hope--when do you think his kingdom will come?

HOPE:

Very soon, perhaps.

KHRAFSTAR (leans forward):

Gabrielle, tomorrow, we plan to take over the temple of Ares in this town. There, we will conduct a ceremony that will allow our god to enter the world.

GABRIELLE (puzzled):

Why the temple of Ares?

HOPE:

He's the God of War.

GABRIELLE (with a dreamy smile):

And you're going to use his temple to usher in a world without war... Hope, that's beautiful.

Ares glances at Gabrielle and rolls his eyes. She spreads her arms in an apologetic gesture of resignation.

ARES:

I think I've had enough of that. Can we please change the channel?

Xena reaches out toward the bead.

Xena is approaching the inn. A dark figure emerges from the shadows.

MAN:

Xena?

Xena looks up warily. The man steps out into the light of the torch fixed to the wall of the inn.

XENA:

Goewin! He's alive!

XENA:

Who are *you*?

GOEWIN:

My name is Goewin. (grimly) I'm the last of the Knights of the Pierced Heart. Xena, I have to talk to you. The fate of the world hangs in the balance.

XENA (suspiciously):

What's this about?

GOEWIN:

Hope and her cult.

XENA (narrows her eyes at him):

You're working for Ares, aren't you?

GOEWIN:

I swear on my life I am not. Xena, listen to what I have to say.

XENA (thinks for a moment):

All right--come on up.

CUT TO

Inside the modest room at the inn, lit by a candle. Xena sits on the bed, Goewin on a chair across from her. She listens, a skeptical look on her face.

GOEWIN:

We saw the signs that the Child of Darkness was about to be born. When we tracked her down, it was too late; the child was too powerful. All my fellow Knights died trying to fight her--save for one who betrayed us.

XENA (incredulous):

You're saying she was conceived four months ago, in that temple in Britannia--as a vessel for Dahak.

GOEWIN:

Hope's mother, Rhianna, told me the whole story--before Hope killed her. (Xena stares at him, still mistrustful but paying attention to what Goewin says) What they did to her--it was pure evil. For the vessel to be born, Dahak needed not just a sacrifice of blood--but of someone's blood innocence. (Xena's eyes widen) This man, Khrafstar, told Rhianna tales of a peaceful and loving god, and lured her to the temple for their ceremony. Then, some of his followers grabbed him and tied him to the altar, and one, a woman named Meridian, raised a dagger as though to sacrifice him. (the camera zooms in on Xena, as the shock of realization gradually comes over her. Goewin's voice is now heard off-screen.) Khrafstar cried for help, and Rhianna came to his aid; she was a strong girl, a hunter and a fighter, though she'd never shed human blood. In the struggle, she stabbed Meridian to death. Khrafstar then rose and thanked her--for giving her purity to Dahak.

XENA (whispers):

Gabrielle...

The camera pulls back for a wide shot of Xena and Goewin.

GOEWIN:

Then, a flame shot out of the altar and wrapped itself around Rhianna and lifted her in the air--and two nights later, she bore a child.

XENA (gets up abruptly):

I believe you. Wait for me here, Goewin. I have to go get my friend back. (she walks toward the door)

GOEWIN:

Be careful--Hope has special powers.

XENA (turns toward him):

Can she be killed?

GOEWIN:

Not with an ordinary weapon.

CUT TO

Xena galloping through the countryside at breakneck speed in the moonlit night.

CUT TO

Hope's and Khrafstar's camp. Dozens of people in white robes lie on the ground asleep. The camera zooms in on Gabrielle, who lies sleeping under a blanket, on her side.

Xena's hand comes into view, shaking Gabrielle's shoulder and then clamping over her mouth. Gabrielle's eyes fly open in shock.

XENA (leans close to Gabrielle's ear):

Shh. Don't make a sound. It's me--I need to talk to you.

CUT TO

Outside the camp. Xena and Gabrielle are standing behind some shrubbery.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, are you mad? Hope is *not* evil!

XENA:

Gabrielle, if you had heard what Goewin told me--

GABRIELLE (heatedly):

Well, this Goewin is obviously working for Ares!

XENA:

Gabrielle, the whole story--it's *exactly* like what happened to you at the temple, except that you didn't kill Meridian! How could he have known that?

GABRIELLE:

Maybe Ares knew! How do you know that Ares wasn't watching when I was in the temple in Britannia? How do you know Meridian and those others weren't working for *him*?

XENA (slowly):

I don't know how I know. I just do.

GABRIELLE (passionately):

Well, that is *not* good enough for me.

XENA (grabs Gabrielle's shoulders and leans toward her, almost in tears):

Gabrielle, just think. What if Goewin is telling the truth? This horrible thing could have happened to *you*...



GABRIELLE:

No, the horrible thing is what's happening to *you*. Xena, don't you see? Ares is trying to kill two birds with one stone: Get you to join him and use you to eliminate someone who threatens his power. And you're falling for it.

XENA (bitterly):

After everything we've been through, you trust Hope more than you trust me.

GABRIELLE (incredulous):

Are you *jealous*? Because I'm looking up to someone other than you? (Xena stares at her in shock, and Gabrielle's face softens) I'm sorry... Xena, you're my best friend...I love you more than anyone in the world. But Hope--she's shown me the promise of a new life. A life without war, without violence, without hate. Don't try to take that away from me.

XENA:

Gabrielle, if you would only--

GABRIELLE:

No! I've heard enough.

She walks away. Xena stares after her in dismay.

Gabrielle drops her head into her hands.

Day. Xena and Goewin are walking up the steps to Ares' temple, a forbidding-looking building with two large cast-iron human skulls on the sides of the entrance.

XENA:

I don't like this. But working with Ares may be our only chance.

CUT TO

Inside the temple. Xena and Goewin come in.

XENA (looks around):

Ares! (pause; she raises her voice a little) Ares! (still no response, and Xena is getting exasperated) Now he's decided to play hard to get. Ares!!!

Ares appears in a flash of blue light.

ARES (sarcastic):

I'm a little busy, if you don't mind. Raising an army to fight Gabrielle's new friends.

XENA (reluctantly):

I'm willing to join you. (quickly catches herself) I mean--only to fight Hope.

ARES (curious):

What changed your mind?

XENA (points to Goewin):

He did. It's a long story. (businesslike) Tell me something, Ares. Is there a way to kill Hope?

ARES (purses his lips):

Maybe.

XENA:

What do you mean--maybe?

Ares holds up his hand; the air shimmers, and a dagger appears in his hand.

ARES:

This is a dagger dipped in the blood of a Golden Hind. One scratch would be deadly to an Olympian. Whether it will work on Dahak's daughter...I'm not sure.

XENA:

Why haven't you tried killing her, then? (off his nervous look, incredulously) You're scared of her!

ARES (scowls):

She always senses when I'm near, okay? She can sense other gods. And she has powers. The girl can glare daggers at you--and I mean literally. (makes a gesture to indicate flying daggers) Whizz--and you're history. (shakes his head) I'm not taking that kind of chance with this thing.

XENA:

All right then--let me have it.

Reluctantly and with obvious embarrassment, he gives her the dagger.

ARES:

It's going to work much better if she's distracted.

XENA (looks at Ares, then at Gabrielle):

This could turn out all right. If we join forces against Hope--

ARES (pointedly):

Just like I asked you to the first time.

Xena shoots him an exasperated look.

An army marches through a field at dusk, with Xena and Goewin riding at its head.

Xena brings Argo to a halt and signals a stop.

XENA (to Goewin):

Wait here. Their camp is on the other side of those trees. I'm going in there and getting Gabrielle out--if she's there. Then, we attack.

GOEWIN:

Right.

XENA:

We don't kill anyone unless we have to. These people aren't evil, just deluded. (she pauses, obviously thinking of Khrafstar; her face hardens) Well--*most* of them.

CUT TO

The camera pans over the abandoned site of the camp. Xena stands looking around, puzzled and troubled.

XENA:

Where are they?

There is a flash of blue light and Ares stands before her.

ARES (grimly):

At the moment, taking over my temple.

CUT TO

The army, led by Xena and Goewin, approaches Ares' temple. As they get close to the steps, the camera pans to a pile of swords, daggers and other weapons piled at the top of the steps. Suddenly, the pile starts to move. In an instant, the weapons rise into the air, hover for a moment, and then fly at dazzling speed toward the advancing army. Several warriors are struck. A disjointed chorus of terrified screams fills the air.

A sword flies toward Goewin's throat. A close-up of his eyes widening in horror, then the camera pulls back to show him falling from his horse.

The camera zooms in on Xena as she catches a dagger flying straight at her, then uses her sword to deflect a blade. Around her, some warriors are falling, dead or wounded--while the rest start to turn around and run in a panic. We see Xena shouting something,

obviously trying to keep them from running, but the screams of the wounded and the shouts of the running men drowns out her voice.

In a few moments, Xena is the only one left. As she looks around, breathing hard, Ares materializes next to her. He is obviously frightened but trying not to show it.

ARES:

That was Hope.

XENA (dryly):

I gather. (gives him a grim stare) You and I are going in.

ARES:

We are?

XENA (impatient):

Ares, you're the God of War. If you go down, don't you want to go down fighting? (off his tight-lipped stare) Look, if you're not taking me inside-- (she dismounts) --I'm going in on my own. I'm not leaving Gabrielle in there with that--*thing*.

She starts to march toward the steps. Ares stares after her, obviously torn between fear and embarrassment.

ARES:

All right. We're going in.

CUT TO

In a flash of light, Xena and Ares appear inside the temple, now crowded with Hope's white-robed followers, whose chants fill the air. Hope before the altar, at the top of some steps. The camera pans to Gabrielle, now wearing a white robe and chanting with the others. Khrafstar stands next to her.

In close-up, we see Hope and then Khrafstar turn sharply toward Ares and Xena. Xena has a dagger in her hand.

A close-up of Gabrielle's horrified face.

GABRIELLE:

Xena--what are you doing?

The chanting stops. Gabrielle runs toward Hope, up the steps of the altar.

XENA:

Get away from her, Gabrielle!

Several of Hope's followers rush toward Xena and Ares.

HOPE (raises her arm):

No! No violence. My god will protect me.

Ares throws a fireball at her. A gasp goes through the temple. Hope stares hard, and the fireball suddenly changes course and is deflected back at Ares, hitting him in the chest. He collapses by the wall, temporarily paralyzed as by Callisto's fireball in SACRIFICE II. There are more gasps and murmurs.

Xena glances quickly at Ares; then, dagger in hand, she continues to advance toward Hope and walks up the stairs. Gabrielle rushes to stand between them.

XENA (through clenched teeth):

Gabrielle, get out of my way.

GABRIELLE:

No! Xena, what's happening to you? You're going to commit murder for Ares?

XENA:

Don't you see what she is?

GABRIELLE:

I don't know what *you* are anymore!

She charges at Xena, trying to grab the dagger away from her. The two women begin to struggle; they lose their footing and tumble down the steps, rolling over several times. As they continue to struggle, Hope and Khrafstar watch them intensely, as does Ares.

Xena cries out.

GABRIELLE:

Xena!

The camera pulls closer to show Gabrielle slowly sitting up. Her hands are bloodied, and she is holding the dagger, which is dripping with blood, staring at it in horror. Xena sits up, clutching at her stomach just below the armor. There is blood seeping through her fingers, her face is contorted with pain.

Gabrielle drops the dagger and cradles Xena in her arms.

GABRIELLE (helplessly):

Xena--I--I--

XENA (her voice breaking):

It was an accident... (she lifts her bloodied hand and touches Gabrielle's face, trying to smile) Gabrielle... (her voice starts to fade) I love you...

She slumps down into Gabrielle's arms. Quick pan to Ares, who is trying to move; the look on his face is a mix of fear, rage, and grief.

GABRIELLE (looks up at Hope in agony):

I murdered her...

In the complete silence, each of Hope's footsteps is heard distinctly as she comes down the steps. She stops, standing over Gabrielle.

HOPE (quietly, with a hint of a smile on her face, in a tone reminiscent of Khrafstar's in THE DELIVERER):

Thank you, Gabrielle.

Gabrielle stares at her uncomprehendingly.

Hope bends down, picks up the Hind's Blood dagger and walks toward Ares just as he sits up. She kneels next to him and puts the dagger to his throat. Ares flinches.

HOPE (smiles):

Don't worry, I won't kill you--yet. My father and I have--other plans for you.

She reaches out and runs her other hand down his chest. Ares shudders, trying to pull away from her touch. Hope laughs and rises to her feet. The camera pulls back for a wide shot of the temple. Gabrielle is still kneeling over Xena's dead body.

HOPE:

This bloodletting will open the way for Dahak's entry into the world!

GABRIELLE (screams):

Noooooooooooo!

Her scream reverberates through the temple.

Xena, Gabrielle, Ares and Eve stare into the portal, too paralyzed with shock to stop the "show," as we:

FADE OUT

TO BE CONTINUED...

[Gabrielle's blood innocence was lost yet again during the production of this motion picture.]